

February 10, 2022

To Members of the Washington State House of Representatives:

Thank you for your leadership on student's social and emotional health and wellbeing. We, the undersigned organizations, ask that you ensure that HB1664 provide schools with the tools to provide a comprehensive and responsive system of support for students.

We support changing the prototypical school funding formula to ensure that all schools have the funding they need for critical social emotional support including staffing. **We also recognize that many schools are facing difficulties in finding and retaining key staff and believe the superintendent of public instruction needs the ability to draft responsive rules for schools who are not able to hire appropriate staff, but who want to continue to invest in student well-being.**

- Many schools already face serious mental health workforce shortages, we must ensure that schools can still fund programs and instruction that can universally support students' wellbeing regardless of workforce availability.
- Fund a system that is inclusive of primary prevention including access to social-emotional learning (SEL). SEL programs and instruction, in the classroom and out of school time, help students to develop skills – like how to [problem solve](#), [build and maintain relationships](#), [manage stress and strong emotions](#), and [have self-confidence](#) - which can help prevent challenges from turning into a crisis.

As an estimated [80% of school-age youth](#) now experience some mental health challenge and [nearly half of Washingtonian students](#) who had depression did not receive any care in the last year – we must ensure all students have access to support that promotes their wellbeing and prevents crises. Schools need the flexibility to support their students in ways that work best for students.

Please amend HB1664 in Section 3 (5)(b)(ii) broadening the rule making to include the following:

“The rules must also provide temporary exceptions, when compliance with (b)(i) is impracticable, to allow school districts to meet the physical, social, and emotional needs of their students with supports, programs, and services.”

Social and emotional support staff are vital, and schools need flexibility to ensure that they can support students, even during a workforce shortage. We believe schools need a variety of tools to address the current needs of students and ask for your support for this amendment.

Sincerely,

Committee for Children
League of Education Voters
Roots of Inclusion
SEL for Washington

Communities in Schools
NAMI Washington
School's Out Washington
The Arc of Washington State
Youth Development Executives of King
County